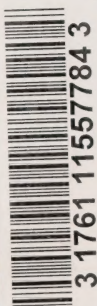


Recommended Code of Practice for Handling Lobsters

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The lobster fishery is of major economic importance to the Atlantic coast of Canada. The industry employs approximately 24,000 people annually in various positions related to the industry and had a marketed value of approximately 89 million dollars in 1979.

In some areas of the Atlantic a high portion of the lobster catch is processed into a canned or frozen state at processing facilities near the landing point. In recent years there has been an increasing trend toward transporting lobsters longer distances for processing with a consequent increase in storage time. There has also been a growing demand by the consumer for live canner lobsters. A large percentage of the total Atlantic catch of lobsters are now therefore shipped live to markets which may be thousands of miles away.

Lobsters, before they reach these markets, are handled at a number of stages during their storage and transport. They are subject to injury and death due to careless handling or exposure to unfavourable conditions all along the route to market. Each year there is a significant loss to the industry of lobsters which die before they reach the consumer.

Most, if not all inshore lobster grounds, have been thoroughly explored and the most productive of these are now heavily exploited. Better management procedures may improve production appreciably in some areas but it is unlikely that this alone will provide the number of lobsters required to meet the growing demand. In order that maximum returns are gained from the available lobster stocks those involved in the lobster fishery must properly handle the catch so that the highest possible percentage reaches the consumer in a marketable state.

Handling Lobsters at Sea

The quality of lobsters reaching the consumer and the survival rate of lobsters shipped live to the marketplace depend to a large extent on the treatment they receive in the fishing boats. Lobsters which are landed often appear to be vigorous but are frequently in such poor condition that even with the best of care, they will die within a few days. Fishermen should follow careful handling techniques which will keep such losses to an absolute minimum, so that greater profits can be returned to all within the fishing industry.

The fishermen should:

- 1. Return all undersized and egg-bearing (berried) lobsters back into the water as soon as possible after they are taken from the trap (or pot).** If lobsters in these stages of life are damaged, it will minimize their chances of survival and thus reduce catches in future years.
- 2. As soon as the “market” lobsters are removed from the traps or pots, both claws should be immobilized, with adhesive tape or rubber bands.** Much of the damage to and loss of lobsters during storage and shipment is due to infection and loss of blood from shell punctures, caused mainly by injuries from unbanded claws.
- 3. In areas where “canner” lobsters are fished, they should be promptly sorted from the larger markets and stored separately.** If the smaller canner lobsters which are not banded are stored with “market” lobsters, injuries will occur. If market and canner lobsters are stored separately after they are removed from the traps or pots, it will reduce handling later.
- 4. Freshly moulted or soft-shelled lobsters should be removed from the traps or pots and stored separately.** Freshly moulted lobsters are vulnerable to injury and if stored separately, damage caused by other lobsters will be minimized. Separate storage will permit the buyer to provide special care to decrease the incidence of injury.
- 5. Lobsters should not be dropped, thrown, picked up by one claw, shovelled or poured from one crate to another.** Handling lobsters by any of these rough, careless techniques can result in internal or external injuries which will weaken the lobsters and reduce the survival rate. When lobsters are moved they should be carefully picked up by the back of the body shell which minimizes damage.

6. **Crates holding lobsters should not be overloaded to a point where the lobsters must be jammed down with heavy boots, shaken down or where any force must be used to close the lids.** Overcrowding results in injuries and deaths.
7. **Lobsters should be handled as little as possible with transfers from one container to another kept to a minimum.** Excessive handling increases the chances of injury, which will weaken them.
8. **Care must be taken when storage crates are placed on top of each other or moved, so that the lobsters' walking legs or claws protruding from the crates are not broken or sheared off.** If claws or walking legs are broken off it will weaken the lobsters and reduce their value.



9. **Exposure to wind, rain, high or freezing temperatures, fresh water or toxic materials must be avoided.** Lobster storage crates should be positioned in areas of the vessels away from toxic materials such as gasoline, oil, insecticides or other contaminants. The crates should not be exposed to direct sunlight, wind, rain or extremes of temperature. Lobster crates should be covered with a tarpaulin in the winter. Wet burlap should be used to cover the crates in the summer or seawater should be thrown over the crates every half hour.
10. **Tanks supplied with running seawater installed in fishing boats, at least in warm weather, would undoubtedly improve the condition and survival of lobsters.**
11. **When fishing for long periods, lobsters caught early in the day should be moored at sea in crates, where possible, to be picked up later on return to port.**
12. **Lobsters should be protected from fresh water, even drip water from melting ice.** Any exposure to fresh water can lead to mortalities.
13. **Crates containing lobsters should not be dropped into the water from the wharf. They should be lowered with ropes.** Dropping will result in internal injuries and losses.
14. **When lobsters are landed the crates should be winched up from the vessel to the dock and not thrown.**
15. **If lobsters are to be stored in water near the port awaiting a buyer, crate storage in contaminated or oily harbour water should be avoided.** Storage in this type of water may result in mortalities.

- 16. As soon as the lobsters have been landed and weighed they should be transported to cool sheltered areas in the summer or heated areas in the winter.**
- 17. If lobsters are to be transported long distances by truck they should be protected from unfavourable weather.** The crates should be covered with a tarpaulin in the winter or wet burlap in the summer. It is recommended that shelter boxes be placed on the trucks to provide protection from adverse weather.

Material in this Recommended Code of Practice has been taken from "Lobster Storage and Shipment" by D.W. McLeese and D.G. Wilder, Fisheries Research Board of Canada, Bulletin # 147. This bulletin should be referred to for further information on the topic and is available through Government of Canada, Supply and Services, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Hull, Quebec K1A 0S9 or Canadian Government book shops.

This is one of a series of Recommended Codes of Practice produced by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0E6.

Published by:

Communications Branch
Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
K1A 0E6

PUB-81/014 E

Disponible en français.



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